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Dec. 29, 01

Dr. Jeff Koenings, Director
Wash. Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
600 Capitol Way N.
Olympia, Wash. 98501-1091

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WDFW
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

Dear Director Koenings:

Your letter of December 6, with reference to Part I of my 'Position Paper' critiquing WDFW actions and focused on the Sagebrush Flats CRM was much appreciated. The decision to reverse the precipitously announced termination of the Billingsley grazing lease was critical for maintaining the credibility of the collaborative CRM process, which is making great contributions to the enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat in Washington. I have been appraised of your expressed commitment for the Department to 'keep its word,' for 'science-based decision making', and to 'be good neighbors' to those adjacent to WDFW owned lands'. This is very encouraging and I believe the recent action taken under your direction regarding Sagebrush Flats is consistent with and lends credence to all of the above commitments.

With regard to science-based decision making, a member of the WFWC has shared with me a view that I can heartily endorse. The point made was that pure science untempered by 'common sense' in its application often misses the mark....as did the concept of 'ecosystem management,' until it became recognized and widely accepted that human beings and their institutions were also an integral part of most ecosystems

The letter you included from the Foster Creek Conservation District commending one of the Department's exemplary employees was also well received. I also believe in sharing success stories and a review of my Position Paper (Part I) will reveal that I also referred to the work of exemplary employees and my efforts to support them over a considerable period of years. But I further noted that field-level successes were frequently undermined by Olympia-based staff and administrative policy. For this reason, I must take issue with your perception that "What happened at Sagebrush Flats....was an exception" and an 'isolated mistake'.

Indeed, the outrage precipitated by the Sagebrush Flats incident was but a reflection of an endemic antagonism toward the WDFW at the local level...particularly among county officials and private land owners abutting Department owned and managed lands. Many natural resource professionals in Washington, both state and federal, perceive that this antagonism is rooted in a very flawed Department administrative policy related to land management. It is a policy which leaves Olympia-based staff to be generally perceived as either ignorant, insensitive or indifferent as to their responsibilities relating to Department-owned lands. I believe a case can be made to suggest that the repeated demotion and marginalization of Department policy-level personnel with the greatest land management expertise has contributed greatly to this rendering of the

WDFW as poorly equipped to recognize, let alone to effectively fulfill, its land management responsibilities....or to even understand what is involved in being a 'good neighbor' to adjacent landowners.

On a more positive note, I wish to report to you that Mark Quinn joined with me and others for a brief meeting at the Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) Annual Meeting in Bellingham in late Nov., where Gov. Locke was the keynote speaker. This meeting and the beginning of dialogue with Mr. Quinn is perceived as a positive first-step, but meaningful prospects of success in meeting the depth and magnitude of challenges to be addressed will require involvement of Department personnel at the highest policy-making level.

My initial criticisms may have come across as very blunt and severe, but my choice of words was calculated to get the Department's immediate attention re. The Sagerbrush Flats CRM issue. These criticisms were followed by more positive comments in hopes of creating a receptiveness for dialogue and an opportunity to address important issues of long-standing. I touched briefly on several of these in my paper, which leaves me a bit puzzled as to your apparent perception that my focus was on a single and isolated incident.

Improving the Department's performance as a public agency is my foremost purpose. I have taken considerable care to prevent this material from falling into the hands of the Department's constant critics and antagonists in hopes of keeping this dialogue positive in tone and constructive. I can assure you that there is a notable level of support and encouragement for my initiative from many who care deeply about the Department.....including faithful employees both past and present, two WDFW recognized 'Wildlife Landowners of the Year', and members of the same Foster Creek Conservation District Board of Supervisors who signed the letter of commendation that you sent to me. These are people who are inclined to think very kindly of the Department, but who share my view that the recent Sagebrush Flats debacle was much less an 'isolated incident' than a reflection of an endemic problem within the Department that is desperately in need of attention at the highest level. Realizing that time is of the essence, it is my hope to be able to proceed directly with the development of Parts II and III of the Position Paper and to transmit them to you and Chairman Cahill at the earliest possible time.

This is neither a particularly pleasant nor a preferred use of my time and energy. The 'Position Paper' initiative detracts from time available to keep commitments already made to the numerous renewable resource related entities that I serve across the state. I remained concerned that Department leadership may fail to recognize the uniqueness of this perhaps once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a serious, in-depth review of land management policy with the benefit of counsel from a group of stewardship-oriented citizens whose goal is to strengthen the WDFW's capability rather than to tear it down.

Sincerely.


Norman R. McClure

Cc: Mr. Russ Cahill, Ch., WFWC
Mr. Wade Troutman, Pres., WACD